

# Science & Spirituality

(A Comprehensive Study)

In the Light of Sri Aurobindo  
and the Mother

Edited by

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## **Section I**

### **Necessary Background: Science**

## Discoveries of Science

“I saw the electric stream on which is run  
The world turned motes and spark-whirls of a Light,  
A Fire of which the nebula and sun  
Are glints and flame-drops, scattered, eremite;

And veiled by viewless Light worked other Powers,  
An Air of movement endless, unbegun,  
Expanding and contracting in Time’s hours  
And the intangible ether of the One.

The surface finds, the screen-phenomenon,  
Are Nature’s offered ransom, while behind  
Her occult mysteries lie safe, unknown,  
From the crude handling of the empiric Mind.

Our truths discovered are but dust and trace  
Of the eternal Energy in her race.”

– Sri Aurobindo

CWSA 02, page 596

## I. Science and the Materialistic Spirit During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

*“Physical Science has proceeded by the soundest and most scrupulous methods and produced a mass of indisputable results which, by their magnitude and far-reaching consequences, have revolutionised the world and justly entitled the age of their development to the title of the wonderful century.”<sup>1</sup>*

“Many hard things have been said about materialism by those who have preferred to look at life from above rather than below or who claim to live in the more luminous atmosphere of the idealistic mind or ether of the spiritual existence. Materialism has been credited with the creation of great evils, viewed even as the archimage of a detestable transformation or the misleader guiding mankind to an appalling catastrophe. Those whose temperament and imagination dally lovingly with an idealised past, accuse it for the cultural, social, political changes which they abhor, regarding them as a disturbance, happily, they believe, temporary, of eternal moral values and divinely ordained hierarchies. Those, more numerous, who look beyond to the hope of a larger idealism and higher spirituality, proclaim in its decline and passing away a fortunate deliverance for the human spirit...Science has been declared suspect as a guide or instructor of mankind and bidden to remain parked within her proper limits, because she was for long the ally of the material view of existence, a suggester of atheism and agnosticism, a victory-bringer of materialism and scepticism, the throne of their reign or pillar of their stability. Reason has been challenged because rationalism and free-thought were appropriated as synonyms of materialistic thinking.”<sup>2</sup>

“All this wealth of accusation may have and much of it has its truth. But most things that the human mind thus alternately trumpets and bans, are a double skein. They come to us with opposite faces, their good side and their bad, a dark aspect of error and a bright of truth; and it is as we look upon one or the other visage that we swing to our extremes of opinion or else oscillate between them. Materialism may not be quite as dead as most would declare it to be; still held by a

considerable number of scientific workers, perhaps a majority, – and scientific opinion is always a force both by its power of well-ascertained truth and its continued service to humanity, – it constitutes even now the larger part of the real temper of action and life even where it is rejected as a set opinion. The strong impressions of the past are not so easily erased out of our human mentality. But it is a fast receding force; other ideas and standpoints are crowding in and thrust it out from its remaining points of vantage.”<sup>3</sup>

“...this age of which materialism was the portentous offspring and in which it had figured first as petulant rebel and aggressive thinker, then as a grave and strenuous preceptor of mankind, has been by no means a period of mere error, calamity and degeneration, but rather a most powerful creative epoch of humanity. Examine impartially its results. Not only has it immensely widened and filled in the knowledge of the race and accustomed it to a great patience of research, scrupulosity, accuracy, – if it has done that only in one large sphere of inquiry, it has still prepared for the extension of the same curiosity, intellectual rectitude, power for knowledge to other and higher fields, – not only has it with an unexampled force and richness of invention brought and put into our hands, for much evil, but also for much good, discoveries, instruments, practical powers, conquests, conveniences which, however we may declare their insufficiency for our highest interests, yet few of us would care to relinquish, but it has also, paradoxical as that might at first seem, strengthened man’s idealism. On the whole, it has given him a kindlier hope and humanised his nature. Tolerance is greater, liberty has increased, charity is more a matter of course, peace, if not yet practicable, is growing at least imaginable. Latterly the thought of the eighteenth century which promulgated secularism has been much scouted and belittled, that of the nineteenth which developed it, riddled with adverse criticism and overpassed. Still they worshipped no mean godheads. Reason, science, progress, freedom, humanity were their ideals, and which of these idols, if idols they are, would we like or ought we, if we are wise, to cast down into the mire or leave as poor unworshipped relics on the wayside? If there are other and yet greater godheads or if the visible forms adored were only clay or stone images or the rites void of the inmost knowledge, yet has their cult been for us a preliminary

initiation and the long material sacrifice has prepared us for a greater religion.”<sup>4</sup>

## **1. Reason**

“Reason is not the supreme light, but yet is it always a necessary light-bringer and until it has been given its rights and allowed to judge and purify our first infra-rational instincts, impulses, rash fervours, crude beliefs and blind prejudgments, we are not altogether ready for the full unveiling of a greater inner luminary.”<sup>5</sup>

## **2. Science**

“Science is a right knowledge, in the end only of processes, but still the knowledge of processes too is part of a total wisdom and essential to a wide and a clear approach towards the deeper Truth behind. If it has laboured mainly in the physical field, if it has limited itself and bordered or overshadowed its light with a certain cloud of wilful ignorance, still one had to begin this method somewhere and the physical field is the first, the nearest, the easiest for the kind and manner of inquiry undertaken. Ignorance of one side of Truth or the choice of a partial ignorance or ignoring for better concentration on another side is often a necessity of our imperfect mental nature. It is unfortunate if ignorance becomes dogmatic and denies what it has refused to examine, but still no permanent harm need have been done if this willed self-limitation is compelled to disappear when the occasion of its utility is exhausted. Now that we have founded rigorously our knowledge of the physical, we can go forward with a much firmer step to a more open, secure and luminous repossession of mental and psychic knowledge. Even spiritual truths are likely to gain from it, not a loftier or more penetrating, – that is with difficulty possible, – but an ampler light and fuller self-expression.”<sup>6</sup>

## **3. Progress**

“Progress is the very heart of the significance of human life, for it means our evolution into greater and richer being;

and these ages by insisting on it, by forcing us to recognise it as our aim and our necessity, by making impossible hereafter the attempt to subsist in the dullness or the gross beatitude of a stationary self-content, have done a priceless service to the earth-life and cleared the ways of heaven. Outward progress was the greater part of its aim and the inward is the more essential? but the inward too is not complete if the outward is left out of account. Even if the insistence of our progress fall for a time too exclusively on growth in one field, still all movement forward is helpful and must end by giving a greater force and a larger meaning to our need of growth in deeper and higher provinces of our being.”<sup>7</sup>

#### **4. Freedom**

“Freedom is a godhead whose greatness only the narrowly limited mind, the State-worshipper or the crank of reaction can now deny. No doubt, again, the essential is an inner freedom; but if without the inner realisation the outer attempt at liberty may prove at last a vain thing, yet to pursue an inner liberty and perpetuate an outer slavery or to rejoice in an isolated release and leave mankind to its chains was also an anomaly that had to be exploded, a confined and too self-centred ideal.”<sup>8</sup>

#### **5. Humanity**

“Humanity is not the highest godhead; God is more than humanity; but in humanity too we have to find and to serve him. The cult of humanity means an increasing kindness, tolerance, charity, helpfulness, solidarity, universality, unity, fullness of individual and collective growth, and towards these things we are advancing much more rapidly than was possible in any previous age, if still with sadly stumbling footsteps and some fierce relapses. The cult of our other human selves within the cult of the Divine comes closer to us as our large ideal. To have brought even one of these things a step nearer, to have helped to settle them with whatever imperfect expression and formula in our minds, to have accelerated our movement towards them are strong achievements, noble services.”<sup>9</sup>

## 6. The Old Religious Cults

“The old religious cultures were often admirable in the ensemble and always in some of their parts, but if they had not been defective, they could neither have been so easily breached, nor would there have been the need of a secularist age to bring out the results the religions had sown. Their faults were those of a certain narrowness and exclusive vision. Concentrated, intense in their ideal and intensive in their effect, their expansive influence on the human mind was small. They isolated too much their action in the individual, limited too narrowly the working of their ideals in the social order, tolerated for instance and even utilised for the ends of church and creed an immense amount of cruelty and barbarism which were contrary to the spirit and truth from which they had started. What they discouraged in the soul of the individual, they yet maintained in the action and the frame of society, seemed hardly to conceive of a human order delivered from these blots. The depth and fervour of their aspiration had for its shadow a want of intellectual clarity, an obscurity which confused their working and balked the expansion of their spiritual elements. They nourished too a core of asceticism and hardly cared to believe in the definite amelioration of the earth life, despised by them as a downfall or a dolorous descent or imperfection of the human spirit, or whatever earthly hope they admitted saw itself postponed to the millennial end of things.”<sup>10</sup>

## 7. The Secularist Centuries

“The secularist centuries weighed the balance down very much in the opposite direction. They turned the mind of the race wholly earthwards and manwards, but by insisting on intellectual clarity, reason, justice, freedom, tolerance, humanity, by putting these forward and putting the progress of the race and its perfectibility as an immediate rule for the earthly life to be constantly pressed towards and not shunting off the social ideal to doomsday to be miraculously effected by some last divine intervention and judgment, they cleared the way for a collective advance. For they made these nobler possibilities of mankind more imperative to the practical intelligence. If



they lost sight of heaven or missed the spiritual sense of the ideals they took over from earlier ages, yet by this rational and practical insistence on them they drove them home to the thinking mind. Even their too mechanical turn developed from a legitimate desire to find some means for making the effective working of these ideals a condition of the very structure of society. Materialism was only the extreme intellectual result of this earthward and human turn of the race mind. It was an intellectual machinery used by the Time-spirit to secure for a good space the firm fixing of that exclusive turn of thought and endeavour, a strong rivet of opinion to hold the mind of man to it for as long as it might be needed. Man does need to develop firmly in all his earthly parts, to fortify and perfect his body, his life, his outward-going mind, to take full possession of the earth his dwelling-place, to know and utilise physical Nature, enrich his environment and satisfy by the aid of a generalised intelligence his evolving mental, vital and physical being. That is not all his need, but it is a great and initial part of it and of human perfection. Its full meaning appears afterwards; for only in the beginning and in the appearance an impulse of his life, in the end and really it will be seen to have been a need of his soul, a preparing of fit instruments and the creating of a fit environment for a diviner life. He has been set here to serve God's ways upon earth and fulfil the Godhead in man and he must not despise earth or reject the basis given for the first powers and potentialities of the Godhead."<sup>11</sup>

## **8. Matter, the Brahman**

"....the intellectual force of materialism comes from its response to a universal truth of existence. Our dominant opinions have always two forces behind them, a need of our nature and a truth of universal existence from which the need arises. We have the material and vital need because life in Matter is our actual basis, the earthward turn of our minds because earth is and was intended to be the foundation here for the workings of the Spirit. When indeed we scan with a scrupulous intelligence the face that universal existence presents to us or study where we are one with it or what in it all seems most

## **Section II**

### **Necessary Background: Spirituality**

## **All Here Is Spirit**

“All here is Spirit self-moved eternally  
For Matter is its seeming or its form,  
A finite motion of Infinity  
Built up by energy’s electric storm,

A flux of solid instability  
Whirled into shape by a tremendous Force  
That labours out the world’s fabric endlessly,  
Creates and then destroys without remorse

Titan and worm, the dew-drop and the sea,  
Our fragile bodies like the aeoned star,  
But through it all remains immortally  
The secret spirit we for ever are.

Matter is Spirit’s semblance glamorous  
Self-woven for its own field and robe and house.”

– Sri Aurobindo

CWSA 02, page 597

# I. The Ways of Knowing – The Process of Knowledge

*“All things are inhabited by this consciousness, even the things that seem to us inconscient and the consciousness in one form can communicate with or contact the consciousness in another or else penetrate or contain or identify with it. This in one form or another is the true process of all knowledge; the rest is ignorant appearance.”<sup>1</sup>*

## 1. The Higher and the Lower Knowledge

*“There are two allied powers in man: knowledge & wisdom. Knowledge is so much of the truth, seen in a distorted medium, as the mind arrives at by groping; wisdom what the eye of divine vision sees in the spirit.”<sup>2</sup>*

“There are two kinds of knowledge, that which seeks to understand the apparent phenomenon of existence externally, by an approach from outside, through the intellect, – this is the lower knowledge, the knowledge of the apparent world; secondly, the knowledge which seeks to know the truth of existence from within, in its source and reality, by spiritual realisation. Ordinarily, a sharp distinction is drawn between the two, and it is supposed that when we get to the higher knowledge, the God-knowledge, then the rest, the world-knowledge, becomes of no concern to us: but in reality they are two sides of one seeking. All knowledge is ultimately the knowledge of God, through himself, through Nature, through her works. Mankind has first to seek this knowledge through the external life; for until its mentality is sufficiently developed, spiritual knowledge is not really possible, and in proportion as it is developed, the possibilities of spiritual knowledge become richer and fuller.

Science, art, philosophy, ethics, psychology, the knowledge of man and his past, action itself are means by which we arrive at the knowledge of the workings of God through Nature and through life. At first it is the workings of

life and forms of Nature which occupy us, but as we go deeper and deeper and get a completer view and experience, each of these lines brings us face to face with God. Science at its limits, even physical Science, is compelled to perceive in the end the infinite, the universal, the spirit, the divine intelligence and will in the material universe. Still more easily must this be the end with the psychic sciences which deal with the operations of higher and subtler planes and powers of our being and come into contact with the beings and the phenomena of the worlds behind which are unseen, not sensible by our physical organs, but ascertainable by the subtle mind and senses. Art leads to the same end; the aesthetic human being intensely preoccupied with Nature through aesthetic emotion must in the end arrive at spiritual emotion and perceive not only the infinite life, but the infinite presence within her; preoccupied with beauty in the life of man he must in the end come to see the divine, the universal, the spiritual in humanity. Philosophy dealing with the principles of things must come to perceive the Principle of all these principles and investigate its nature, attributes and essential workings. So ethics must eventually perceive that the law of good which it seeks is the law of God and depends on the being and nature of the Master of the law. Psychology leads from the study of mind and the soul in living beings to the perception of the one soul and one mind in all things and beings. The history and study of man like the history and study of Nature lead towards the perception of the eternal and universal Power and Being whose thought and will work out through the cosmic and human evolution. Action itself forces us into contact with the divine Power which works through, uses, overrules our actions. The intellect begins to perceive and understand, the emotions to feel and desire and revere, the will to turn itself to the service of the Divine without whom Nature and man cannot exist or move and by conscious knowledge of whom alone we can arrive at our highest possibilities. It is here that Yoga steps in. It begins by using knowledge, emotion and action for the possession of the Divine. For Yoga is the conscious and perfect seeking of union with the Divine towards which all the rest was an ignorant and imperfect

## **Section III**

### **Views of Reality, Aims and Methods**

## Discoveries of Science

“Our science is an abstract cold and brief  
That cuts in formulas the living whole.  
It has a brain and head but not a soul:  
It sees all things in outward carved relief.

But how without its depths can the world be known?  
The visible has its roots in the unseen  
And each invisible hides what it can mean  
In a yet deeper invisible, unshown.

The objects that you probe are not their form.  
Each is a mass of forces thrown in shape.  
The forces caught, their inner lines escape  
In a fathomless consciousness beyond mind’s norm.

Probe it and you shall meet a Being still  
Infinite, nameless, mute, unknowable.”

– Sri Aurobindo

SABCL 5: 168

## I. The Subjective and the Objective View of Reality and Knowledge

*“When our minds are involved in matter, they think matter the only reality; when we draw back into immaterial consciousness, then we see matter a mask and feel existence in consciousness alone as having the touch of reality. Which then of these two is the truth? Nay, God knoweth; but he who has had both experiences, can easily tell which condition is the more fertile in knowledge, the mightier & more blissful.*

*I believe immaterial consciousness to be truer than material consciousness? Because I know in the first what in the second is hidden from me & also can command what the mind knows in matter.*

*Hell & Heaven exist only in the soul’s consciousness. Ay, but so does the earth and its lands & seas & fields & deserts & mountains & rivers. All world is nothing but arrangement of the Soul’s seeing.”<sup>1</sup>*

In the subjective view of Reality the worlds are only frames of our experience, the senses only instruments of experience. “Consciousness is the great underlying fact, the universal witness for whom the world is a field, the senses instruments. To that witness the worlds and their objects appeal for their reality and for the one world or the many, for the physical equally with the supraphysical we have no other evidence that they exist. It has been argued that this is no relation peculiar to the constitution of humanity and its outlook upon an objective world, but the very nature of existence itself; all phenomenal existence consists of an observing consciousness and an active objectivity, and the Action cannot proceed without the Witness because the universe exists only in or for the consciousness that observes and has no independent reality. It has been argued in reply that the material universe enjoys an eternal self-existence: it was here before life and mind made their appearance: it will survive after they have disappeared and no longer trouble with their transient strivings and limited thoughts the eternal



and inconscient rhythm of the suns.”<sup>2</sup> The difference, so metaphysical in appearance, is yet of the utmost practical import, for it determines the whole outlook of man upon life and raises the question of the reality of cosmic existence and the value of human life. But this question cannot be solved by logic based on the data of our ordinary physical existence with its limited consciousness and experience. Only by an extension of the field of our consciousness and an increase in our instruments of knowledge can this quarrel be resolved.

“The extension of our consciousness, to be satisfying, must necessarily be an inner enlargement from the individual into the cosmic existence. For the Witness, if he exists, is not the individual embodied mind born in the world, but that cosmic Consciousness embracing the universe and appearing as an immanent Intelligence in all its works to which either world subsists eternally and really as Its own active existence or else from which it is born and into which it disappears by an act of knowledge or by an act of conscious power. Not organised mind, but that which, calm and eternal, broods equally in the living earth and the living human body and to which mind and senses are dispensable instruments, is the Witness of cosmic existence and its Lord.”<sup>3</sup> To the man who has had contact with it or lives in it, the cosmic consciousness is real with a greater than the physical reality; real in itself, real in its effects and works. “And as it is thus real to the world which is its own total expression, so is the world real to it; but not as an independent existence. For in that higher and less hampered experience we perceive that consciousness and being are not different from each other, but all being is a supreme consciousness, all consciousness is self-existence, eternal in itself, real in its works and neither a dream nor an evolution. The world is real precisely because it exists only in consciousness; for it is a Conscious Energy one with Being that creates it. It is the existence of material form in its own right apart from the self-illuminated energy which assumes the form, that would be a contradiction of the truth of things, a phantasmagoria, a nightmare, an impossible falsehood.”<sup>4</sup>

“There is a precisely opposite view of reality and knowledge which affirms an objective Reality as the only entire truth and an objective knowledge as the sole entirely reliable knowledge. This view starts from the idea of physical existence as the one fundamental existence and the relegation of consciousness, mind, soul or spirit to the position of a temporary outcome of the physical Energy in its cosmic action, – if indeed soul or spirit has any existence. All that is not physical and objective has a lesser reality dependent on the physical and objective; it has to justify itself to the physical mind by objective evidence or a recognisable and verifiable relation to the truth of physical and external things before it can be given a passport of reality. But it is evident that this solution cannot be accepted in its rigour, as it has no integrality in it but looks at only one side of existence, even only one province or district of existence, and leaves all the rest unexplained, without inherent reality, without significance. If pushed to its extreme, it would give to a stone or a plum-pudding a greater reality and to thought, love, courage, genius, greatness, the human soul and mind facing an obscure and dangerous world and getting mastery over it an inferior dependent reality or even an unsubstantial and evanescent reality. For in this view these things so great to our subjective vision are valid only as the reactions of an objective material being to an objective material existence; they are valid only in so far as they deal with objective realities and make themselves effective upon them: the soul, if it exists, is only a circumstance of an objectively real world-Nature. But it could be held, on the contrary, that the objective assumes value only as it has a relation to the soul; it is a field, an occasion, a means for the soul’s progression in Time: the objective is created as a ground of manifestation for the subjective. The objective world is only an outward form of becoming of the Spirit; it is here a first form, a basis, but it is not the essential thing, the main truth of being. The subjective and objective are two necessary sides of the manifested Reality and of equal value, and in the range of the objective itself the supraphysical object of consciousness has as much right to acceptance as the physical objectivity; it cannot be *a priori* set aside as a

## **Section IV**

### **Approach to Knowledge and Perfection**

“What now we see is a shadow of what must come.  
The earth’s uplook to a remote Unknown  
Is a preface only of the epic climb  
Of human soul from its flat earthly state  
To the discovery of a greater self  
And the far gleam of an eternal Light.  
This world is a beginning and a base  
Where Life and Mind erect their structured dreams;  
An unborn Power must build reality.  
A deathbound littleness is not all we are:  
Immortal our forgotten vastnesses  
Await discovery in our summit selves;  
Unmeasured breadths and depths of being are ours.”

– Sri Aurobindo

CWSA 33, p. 46

## I. Introduction

“Spirit is the crown of universal existence; Matter is its basis; Mind is the link between the two. Spirit is that which is eternal; Mind and Matter are its workings. Spirit is that which is concealed and has to be revealed; mind and body are the means by which it seeks to reveal itself. Spirit is the image of the Lord of the Yoga; mind and body are the means He has provided for reproducing that image in phenomenal existence. All Nature is an attempt at a progressive revelation of the concealed Truth, a more and more successful reproduction of the divine image.

But what Nature aims at for the mass in a slow evolution, Yoga effects for the individual by a rapid revolution. It works by a quickening of all her energies, a sublimation of all her faculties....Nature seeks the Divine in her own symbols: Yoga goes beyond Nature to the Lord of Nature, beyond universe to the Transcendent and can return with the transcendent light and power, with the fiat of the Omnipotent.

But their aim is one in the end. The generalisation of Yoga in humanity must be the last victory of Nature over her own delays and concealments. Even as now by the progressive mind in Science she seeks to make all mankind fit for the full development of the mental life, so by Yoga must she inevitably seek to make all mankind fit for the higher evolution, the second birth, the spiritual existence. And as the mental life uses and perfects the material, so will the spiritual use and perfect the material and the mental existence as the instruments of a divine self-expression.”<sup>1</sup>

The scientific and spiritual approaches have traditionally been characterised by a lack of mutual understanding and appreciation because, as discussed earlier, the method of science is just the opposite of the spiritual way of doing things. Science makes the inner a result of the outer, fundamentally a phenomenon of Matter and it works upon this view of things. Most psychologists and other scientific minds working in various branches of science which deal with occult phenomena

and mystic experiences subscribe to this method and this view of reality. As we had discussed, the neurotheologists believe that all the mystical experiences and the reality of God spring entirely from a peculiar wiring of the human brain and have no independent existence. Scientists are trying to trace all mental events to chemical reactions in the brain. They are measuring minuscule amounts of brain chemicals, tagging them and tracing their intricate pathways to identify mental events – memory, concentration, fear, love, aggression, etc. – as basically chemical events. The reductionist movement – the movement to reduce all deeper and higher things to the working of material forces – shows no signs of abating. The aim of modern biology seems to explain all biology in terms of physics and chemistry. And all this denial of the higher domains is continuing along with a strong revival of occultism, Eastern mysticism and spiritual disciplines in all the four corners of the non-Islamic world. Speaking about the reason behind this denial by the scientists, the Mother observed, “...when you do not have the experience yourself, another person’s experience is not convincing, it cannot convince you....A thing one has not experienced does not exist.

Even if some kind of miracle were to happen in front of them, they would have a material explanation for it; for them it would not be a miracle in the sense of an intervention of a force or power other than the material forces and powers. They would have their material explanation. For them it would not be convincing.

You can only understand if you yourself have touched this domain in your experience.

...And precisely because they have acquired the capacity to explain, they explain external phenomena to themselves in such a way that they remain in their denial of the reality of inner phenomena – they say that these are, as it were, extensions of what they have studied.

Only, because of his very constitution, because there hardly exists a human being who hasn’t at least a reflection,

or a shadow, or a beginning of a relation with his subtle being, his inner being, his soul – because of that there is always a flaw in their denial. But they consider that to be a weakness – it is their only strength.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Knowledge of the Scientist and the Yogi**

“The climax of the ordinary consciousness is Science. For Science, what is upon the earth is true, simply because it is there. What it calls Nature is for it the final reality, and its aim is to build up a theory to explain the workings of it. So it climbs as high as the physical mind can go and tries to find out the causes of what it assumes to be the true, the real world. But in fact it adapts “causes” to “effects”, for it has already taken that which is for the true, the real and seeks only to explain it mentally. For the yogic consciousness, however, this world is not the final reality. Rising above the mind into the overmind and then into the supermind, it enters the divine world of first truths, and looking down from there sees what has happened to those truths here. How distorted they have become, how completely falsified! So the so-called world of fact is for the Yogi a falsehood and not at all the only true reality. It is not what it ought to be, it is almost the very opposite; whereas for the scientist it is absolutely fundamental.

Our aim is to change things. The scientist says that whatever is, is natural and cannot be changed at heart. But, really speaking, the laws of which he usually speaks are of his own mental making; and because he accepts Nature as it is as the very basis, things do not and cannot change for him in any complete sense. But, according to us, all this can be changed, because we know that there is something above, a divine truth seeking manifestation. There are no fixed laws here; even Science in its undogmatic moments recognizes that the laws are mere mental constructions. There are only cases, and if the mind could apply itself to all the circumstances it would find that no two cases are similar. Laws are for the mind’s convenience, but the process of the supramental manifestation is different, we may even say it is the reverse of the mind. In the

supramental realization, each thing will carry in itself a truth which will manifest at each instant without being bound by what has been or what will follow. That elaborate linking of the past with the present, which gives things in Nature such an air of unchangeable determinism is altogether the mind's way of conceiving, and is no proof that all that exists is inevitable and cannot be otherwise.

The knowledge possessed by the Yogi is also an answer to the terrible theory that all that takes place is God's direct working. For once you rise to the Supermind you immediately perceive that the world is false and distorted. The supramental truth has not at all found manifestation. How then can the world be a genuine expression of the Divine? Only when the Supermind is established and rules here, then alone the Supreme Will may be said to have authentically manifested. At the same time, we must steer clear of the dangerous exaggeration of the sense of the falsehood of the world, which comes to those who have risen to the higher consciousness. What happened with Shankara and others like him was that they had a glimpse of the true consciousness, which threw the falsehood of this world into such sharp contrast that they declared the universe to be not only false but also a really non-existent illusion which should be entirely abandoned. We, on the other hand, see its falsehood, but realize also that it has to be replaced and not abandoned as an illusion. Only, the truth has got mistranslated, something has stepped in to pervert the divine reality, but the world is in fact meant to express it. And to express it is indeed our Yoga."<sup>3</sup>



## **II. The Scientific Approach to Knowledge and Perfection: A Critical Appraisal**

“The world of living beings abounds in the unexplained. Scientists have devised crafty ways to explain it away. The first way is to simply deny. One shuts one’s eyes and says it is not true, it cannot be so, one must be mistaken. Thus their mind selectively keeps out data.

The second way is to indulge in mathematical juggling. Here, a veil of statistics is put on the ‘anomalies’ by saying that its probability of occurrence is not significant enough and hence can be attributed to chance! This is strange logic, for even a single case deserves our attention and needs to be explained. Even if the probability of its occurrence is low, it is still a possibility whose small door may lead us to a vast store of knowledge and power.

Finally, the most cunning device is to explain it away. Here through mental gymnastics, a hypothesis is put forward based on ‘known material processes’ but confined to the strictly mechanical model. This dogmatic assertion, that whatever the evidence, I shall not deviate from my belief that material reality is the sole reality, actually becomes unscientific.

Yet, the anomalous abounds and mocks our dogmatic assertions. It forces itself upon our beliefs and disbeliefs. It knocks at the gates of our senses seeking admittance. It enters from a vast unknown, surrounding us on all sides, smashing our safe boundaries. The old gives place to the new. Thus science moves from wonder to greater wonder... ”<sup>4</sup>

### **1. The Nature and Limitations of the Scientific Approach**

#### **(a) Science and the Deeper View of Existence**

“The material universe is only the façade of an immense building which has other structures behind it, and it is only if one knows the whole that one can have some knowledge

## **Section V**

### **The Future Vistas and the Nature of the Present Crisis Facing Humanity**

“The changes we see in the world today are intellectual, moral, physical in their ideal and intention: the spiritual revolution waits for its hour and throws up meanwhile its waves here and there. Until it comes the sense of the others cannot be understood and till then all interpretation of present happening and forecast of man’s future are vain things. For its nature, power, event are that which will determine the next cycle of our humanity.”

– Sri Aurobindo  
CWSA 13, p. 211

## I. The Future Vistas

### 1. The Meeting of Science and Spirituality: The Possibility of Convergence of the Two Approaches

*“When Wisdom comes, her first lesson is, “There is no such thing as knowledge; there are only aperçus of the Infinite Deity.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Practical knowledge is a different thing; that is real and serviceable, but it is never complete. Therefore to systematise and codify it is necessary but fatal.”<sup>2</sup>*

*“Systematise we must, but even in making and holding the system, we should always keep firm hold on this truth that all systems are in their nature transitory and incomplete.”<sup>3</sup>*

“There was a time – for a very long period – when I thought that if science were to realise its full potential, but in an absolute way, if that were possible, it would reach true Knowledge. For example, in its study of the composition of Matter, by pushing and pushing its investigations further and further, a time would come when the two would meet. Well, when I had the experience of passing from the eternal Truth-consciousness to the consciousness of the individualised world, it became clear to me that this was impossible. And if you ask me now, I think that both these lings, the possibility of a meeting by carrying science to its extreme and the impossibility of any true conscious connection with the material world, are equally incorrect. There is something else.

And these last few days, more and more, I find myself faced with the total problem, as if I had never seen it before.

Perhaps they are two paths leading to a third point, and at the moment perhaps it is this third point that I am not exactly studying, but searching for, where the two would meet in a third one which would be the True Thing.

But certainly, objective, scientific knowledge carried to its extreme, if it is possible for it to become absolutely total,

leads at least to the threshold. That is what Sri Aurobindo says. Only he says that it is fatal, because all those who have devoted themselves to that knowledge, have believed in it as an absolute truth, and for them this has closed the door to the other approach. In that way it is fatal.

But according to my personal experience, I could say that for all those who believe in the *exclusive* spiritual approach, the approach through inner experience, at least if it is exclusive, is also fatal – because it shows them *one* aspect, *one* truth of the Whole, not the Whole. The other aspect seems equally indispensable to me, in the sense that while I was so totally immersed in the supreme Realisation, it was absolutely indisputable that the other realisation, the outer, the illusory one, was only a distortion, probably accidental, of something that was *just* as true as that one.

It is this “something” that we are searching for – perhaps not only searching for it, but *making* it. We are being used so that we can participate in the manifestation of “that”, of “that” which is still inconceivable to everyone, because it is not yet there. It is an expression that is yet to come.

This is all I can say.

(*Silence*)

That is really the state of consciousness I am living in at present. It is as if I were confronted with this eternal problem, but *from another standpoint*.

These standpoints, the spiritual and the “materialist”, if one may say so, that think they are exclusive – exclusive and unique, so that one denies the value of the other, from the point of view of Truth – are insufficient, not only because they do not accept one another, but also because to accept both and to unite both is not enough to solve the problem. It is something else – a third thing which is not the result of these two, but something that is yet to be discovered, which will probably open the door to the total Knowledge.”<sup>4</sup>

“I do not think that a single individual on the earth as it

is now, a single individual, however great, however eternal his consciousness and origin, can on his own change and realise – change the world, change the creation as it is and realise this higher Truth which will be a new world, a world more true, if not absolutely true. It would seem that a certain number of individuals – until now it seems to have been more in time, as a succession, but it could also be in space, a collectivity – are indispensable so that this Truth can become concrete and realise itself.

Practically, I am sure of it.

That is to say, however great, however conscious, however powerful he may be, *one* Avatar cannot by himself realise the supramental life on earth. It is either a group in time, extending over a period of time, or a group spread out in space – perhaps both – that are indispensable for this Realisation. I am convinced of it.”<sup>5</sup>

The consciousness that is higher than either of the two consciousnesses in question – the scientific and the spiritual – “is ...the supramental consciousness which contains all the other consciousnesses in itself and can thus know everything on all planes of being. This is the consciousness we should aspire for, this is the consciousness which can teach us the total Truth.”<sup>6</sup>

As pointed out earlier, both the scientific and spiritual approaches can be expected – as the terrestrial evolution advances – to merge into the supramental or gnostic Consciousness which alone can give total knowledge and perfection – a perfection not only individual but also collective.

Man, as long as he is man, that is limited to a mental consciousness, the attainment of true knowledge, perfection or fulfillment are impossible for him. “The Vedantic position was that the Mind itself (as well as the senses) is a limited power making its own representations, constructions, formations and imposing them on the Reality. That is a much bigger and more intricate affair shooting down into the very roots of our existence.”<sup>7</sup> Even on its own plane the possibilities of mental

consciousness are practically unlimited, for there can hardly be any limit to mental representations, constructions and formations that the mind can make of the Infinite, Eternal and Absolute Reality. If the terrestrial evolution were to remain limited to mental consciousness, – even to the highest layers of spiritualized mind – as it has been in the past, then the two approaches could have continued, as in the past, to explore and seek after Truth and Perfection without ever really arriving at them or meeting each other. In such a scenario, the scientific explorations and discoveries may continue indefinitely bringing about surprising and even drastic changes in the outer living conditions but without leading man to any true deliverance or fulfillment, for that depends much more on the inner psychological condition than on the outer material condition. Also, the highest attainments that may be possible through the spiritualized mind will still fall short of the total knowledge and perfection and may not have the power to convince all those subscribing to a purely materialistic approach.

## **2. Ascension to the Supramental Supernature Essential for True Knowledge and Perfection**

“This is the whole sense and the inherent law and necessity of the passage from the purely mental and material being and life to the spiritual and supramental being and life, that the liberation, perfection, self-fulfilment for which the being in the Ignorance is seeking can only be reached by passing out of his present nature of Ignorance into a nature of spiritual self-knowledge and world-knowledge. This greater nature we speak of as Supernature because it is beyond his actual level of consciousness and capacity; but in fact it is his own true nature, the height and completeness of it, to which he must arrive if he is to find his real self and whole possibility of being. Whatever happens in Nature must be the result of Nature, the effectuation of what is implied or inherent in it, its inevitable fruit and consequence. If our nature is a fundamental Inconscience and Ignorance arriving with difficulty at an imperfect knowledge, an imperfect formulation of consciousness and being, the results in our being, life and action and creation must be, as

they now are, a constant imperfection and insecure half result, an imperfect mentality, an imperfect life, an imperfect physical existence. We seek to construct systems of knowledge and systems of life by which we can arrive at some perfection of our existence, some order of right relations, right use of mind, right use and happiness and beauty of life, right use of the body. But what we achieve is a constructed half-rightness mixed with much that is wrong and unlovely and unhappy; our successive constructions, because of the vice in them and because mind and life cannot rest permanently anywhere in their seeking, are exposed to destruction, decadence, disruption of their order, and we pass from them to others which are not more finally successful or enduring, even if on one side or another they may be richer and fuller or more rationally plausible. It cannot be otherwise, because we can construct nothing which goes beyond our nature; imperfect, we cannot construct perfection, however wonderful may seem to us the machinery our mental ingenuity invents, however externally effective. Ignorant, we cannot construct a system of entirely true and fruitful self-knowledge or world-knowledge: our science itself is a construction, a mass, of formulas and devices; masterful in knowledge of processes and in the creation of apt machinery, but ignorant of the foundations of our being and of world-being, it cannot perfect our nature and therefore cannot perfect our life.

Our nature, our consciousness is that of beings ignorant of each other, separated from each other, rooted in a divided ego, who must strive to establish some kind of relation between their embodied ignorances; for the urge to union and forces making for union are there in Nature. Individual and group harmonies of a comparative and qualified completeness are created, a social cohesion is accomplished; but in the mass the relations formed are constantly marred by imperfect sympathy, imperfect understanding, gross misunderstandings, strife, discord, unhappiness. It cannot be otherwise so long as there is no true union of consciousness founded upon a nature of self-knowledge, inner mutual knowledge, inner realisation of unity, concord of our inner forces of being and inner forces



of life. In our social building we labour to establish some approach to unity, mutuality, harmony, because without these things there can be no perfect social living; but what we build is a constructed unity, an association of interests and egos enforced by law and custom and imposing an artificial constructed order in which the interests of some prevail over the interests of others and only a half accepted half enforced, half natural half artificial accommodation keeps the social whole in being. Between community and community there is a still worse accommodation with a constant recurrence of the strife of collective ego with collective ego. This is the best that we can do and all our persistent readjustments of the social order can bring us nothing better than an imperfect structure of life.

It is only if our nature develops beyond itself, if it becomes a nature of self-knowledge, mutual understanding, unity, a nature of true being and true life that the result can be a perfection of ourselves and our existence, a life of true being, a life of unity, mutuality, harmony, a life of true happiness, a harmonious and beautiful life. If our nature is fixed in what it is, what it has already become, then no perfection, no real and enduring happiness is possible in earthly life; we must seek it not at all and do the best we can with our imperfections, or we must seek it elsewhere, in a supraterrrestrial hereafter, or we must go beyond all such seeking and transcend life by an extinction of nature and ego in some Absolute from which this strange and unsatisfactory being of ours has come into existence. But if in us there is a spiritual being which is emerging and our present state is only an imperfection or half-emergence, if the Inconscient is a starting-point containing in itself the potency of a Superconscience and Supernature which has to evolve, a veil of apparent Nature in which that greater consciousness is concealed and from which it has to unfold itself, if an evolution of being is the law, then what we are seeking for is not only possible but part of the eventual necessity of things. It is our spiritual destiny to manifest and become that Supernature, – for it is the nature of our true self, our still occult, because unevolved, whole being. A nature of unity will then bring inevitably its life-result of unity, mutuality,

of one's world;<sup>[6]</sup> there the life<sup>[7]</sup> in the eternally consummate Being and the realisation of His divine nature<sup>[8]</sup> in our human existence." (CWSA 21: 15-19)

### 3. The Future

In the light of the Nature of the Absolute as formulated above in the words of Sri Aurobindo, all human knowledge and attempts at knowing – of any kind whatsoever by anyone – can really amount to anything more than a way of looking at things; a way which always differs according to the place, time and person – the wise traditional Indian formula of Desha, Kala and Patra which must necessarily be applied to all expressions of knowledge and understanding if they are to escape the rigidity of a mental formula and its ensuing falsehood when applied to life without reference to it.

All that has been written and expressed here is just our way of looking at things which, fundamentally, is not necessarily better than any other sincere attempt to look at things in the light of one's consciousness and experience. It seems certain to us that the present phase of an unbridled human pursuit of knowledge and exploration in all the fields and walks of life is not going to stop short at any conceivable limit – even if it be the one conceived by the highest and most vast human intelligence. The resulting growth of our being may be divided into two very broad categories – the “inner” and the “outer”. What we call Science is concerned with the “outer” which by itself is always going to be limited to an increasingly efficient manipulation by the human consciousness of what it considers external to it and, as pointed out by Sri Aurobindo earlier, the result will be limited to achieving comfort and not the fullness of our being which alone can bring true fulfilment and happiness

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<sup>[6]</sup> *Svārājya* and *sāmrājya*, the double aim proposed to itself by the positive Yoga of the ancients.

<sup>[7]</sup> *Sālokya-mukti*, liberation by conscious existence in one world of being with the Divine.

<sup>[8]</sup> *Sādharmya-mukti*, liberation by assumption of the Divine Nature.

– primarily a psychological phenomenon. The inner approach is the province of that which is termed Spirituality and whose pursuit enables one to approach and live into ever deeper and higher layers of one's being. The traditional approach to it has been through religion, occultism, spiritual philosophy and spiritual experience. All these represent, essentially, Nature's attempt to open the inner being.

The past two hundred years which marked a period, especially in the West, of almost an exclusive concentration on the "outer" has been one of the most rapid and important phases in the evolution of Earth. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "...advancing Knowledge should base herself on a clear, pure and disciplined intellect. It is necessary, too, that she should correct her errors sometimes by a return to the restraint of sensible fact, the concrete realities of the physical world. The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness – to its heights we can always Reach – when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. "Earth is His footing," [9] says the Upanishad whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe. And it is certainly the fact that the wider we extend and the surer we make our knowledge of the physical world, the wider and surer becomes our foundation for the higher knowledge, even for the highest, even for the Brahmanidya.

In emerging, therefore, out of the materialistic period of human Knowledge we must be careful that we do not rashly condemn what we are leaving or throw away even one tittle of its gains, before we can summon perceptions and powers that are well grasped and secure, to occupy their place. Rather we shall observe with respect and wonder the work that Atheism has done for the Divine and admire the services that Agnosticism has rendered in preparing the illimitable increase of knowledge. In our world error is continually the handmaid and pathfinder of Truth; for error is really a half-truth that stumbles because of its limitations; often it is Truth that wears a disguise in order to arrive unobserved near to its goal. Well,

if it could always be, as it has been in the great period we are leaving, the faithful handmaid, severe, conscientious, clean-handed, luminous within its limits, a half-truth and not a reckless and presumptuous aberration.” (CWSA 21: 13-14)

With the spread of the work and the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and many other prominent Spiritual personalities during the last century, the “inner approach” was brought to the forefront of human consciousness but, nevertheless, remained – and still remains – confined to a small fraction of humanity in whom it has been effective in moulding, at least to some extent, their actions, life and thinking. The “outer approach” is still predominant and under the growing impetus of the new discoveries of science and their application, especially in the fields of IT, AI, and Outer Space, appears to be overshadowing and marginalising spirituality – though not religion and its ceremonial expressions – and all genuine inner efforts directed at changing human psychology and behaviour. A very serious environmental crisis – very grave for the Indian subcontinent – engendered by a deadly combination of materialistic science and a utilitarian spirit has brought things to such a pass that humanity is facing the danger of extinction if the present balance of forces continues to prevail even for a few more decades. Lest one take comfort even in this scenario – given the witnessed incurable propensity of modern man to do so – it needs to be pointed out that the growing militarization of the ever more potent and deadly discoveries in the various fields of science and technology is fraught with great danger and can bring about the extinction of life on earth any time in the near future.

In the light of the above, it seems instructive to look into the future prospects for humanity by considering it under the following four possible scenarios progressing from the Worst to the Best in our view:

(i) The balance between the two aforementioned approaches – the “inner” and the “outer” – remains practically unchanged from what it is at present. This means that there

is practically nothing that enables humanity to change course and the present ever growing trends in the Utilitarian Spirit and Science continues unabated leading to an extinction of human life on earth either through a catastrophic War or a very serious and irreversible (in the short-run) environmental crisis or a mixture of both. Because without a change in the present balance in the near future, for a humanity so heedless and disposed as the present, no advice to change course or any such warning as that of the materialistic scientist Stephen Hawking who advised it to look for another planet for human habitation before this becomes uninhabitable by the end of the century, can be expected to have any significant impact.

(ii) The balance between the “Inner” and the “Outer” changes, somewhat, in favour of the “Inner” just enough to save humanity from extinction but not from a very large scale suffering and destruction which may be looked upon as a means used by Nature to turn the scales further in favour of the “Inner” to enable it to arrive at and continue on a sustainable course of integral development leading it towards a transition from the human (mental) to the divine (supramental).

(iii) The balance between the two approaches gets altered sufficiently in favour of the “Inner” to enable humanity to chart a much safer course – though still not without much suffering and destruction – and arrive at an optimum balance between the two approaches to enable it to proceed on the path of integral development leading it towards a transition from the human to the divine.

(iv) By a special descent and action of the divine Force the optimum balance between the Inner and the Outer is achieved without much suffering and destruction and humanity is swiftly led towards the conditions necessary for the establishment of the divine Life upon earth.

Except for the first scenario, all the other three are consistent with Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s vision of a divine Life upon earth repeatedly expressed in their writings.

The following lines from Sri Aurobindo's Epic Savitri are most inspiring and reassuring:

*“All earth shall be the Spirit's manifest home,  
Hidden no more by the body and the life,  
Hidden no more by the mind's ignorance;  
An unerring Hand shall shape event and act.  
The Spirit's eyes shall look through Nature's eyes,  
The Spirit's force shall occupy Nature's force.  
This world shall be God's visible garden-house,  
The earth shall be a field and camp of God,  
Man shall forget consent to mortality  
And his embodied frail impermanence.  
This universe shall unseal its occult sense,  
Creation's process change its antique front,  
An ignorant evolution's hierarchy  
Release the Wisdom chained below its base.  
The Spirit shall be the master of his world  
Lurking no more in form's obscurity  
And Nature shall reverse her action's rule,  
The outward world disclose the Truth it veils;  
All things shall manifest the covert God,  
All shall reveal the Spirit's light and might  
And move to its destiny of felicity.  
Even should a hostile force cling to its reign  
And claim its right's perpetual sovereignty  
And man refuse his high spiritual fate,  
Yet shall the secret Truth in things prevail.  
For in the march of all-fulfilling Time  
The hour must come of the Transcendent's will:  
All turns and winds towards his predestined ends  
In Nature's fixed inevitable course*

*Decreed since the beginning of the worlds  
In the deep essence of created things:  
Even there shall come as a high crown of all  
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance.*

.....

*Nature shall live to manifest secret God,  
The Spirit shall take up the human play,  
This earthly life become the life divine.”*

(CWSA 34: 707-10)

For those like us who have an unshakeable faith in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the first possibility is ruled out. We feel that the last is to be aspired for but the third seems most likely and even the second cannot be ruled out. Let it be as it may be but we cannot simply leave it here. We must aspire for the Best and join with all our heart and soul with the Mother in the following prayer of hers:

“The world is fighting for its spiritual life menaced by the rush of hostile and undivine forces.

Lord, we aspire to be Thy valiant warriors so that Thy glory may manifest upon the earth.” (CWM 15: 167)

“The future of the earth depends on a change of consciousness.

The only hope for the future is in a change of man’s consciousness and the change is bound to come.

But it is left to men to decide if they will collaborate for this change or if it will have to be enforced upon them by the power of crashing circumstances.

So, wake up and collaborate!

Blessings.” (CWM 15: 66)

